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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the relationship between apprehension and the quality of writing when that writing was aimed at a distant and at a familiar audience. Fifty-eight freshman English students from a two-year college were given a questionnaire to assess their level of writing apprehension. They were then asked to write two in-class essays, the first to a television station manager (distant audience) and the second to a friend, relative, or spouse (familiar audience). The essays were evaluated for writing quality, syntactic maturity, and coherence. The analysis of data revealed no significant relationship between apprehension and the quality of writing in either of the two essays. However, the results did show a significant difference between the quality of writing in the essay aimed at the familiar audience and that aimed at the distant audience, without regard to apprehension. The syntactic maturity scores for the distant audience essays were significantly higher than those for the familiar audience essays. Conversely, the coherence scores for the distant audience essays were lower than those for the familiar audience essays. (The writing apprehension test, coherence measures, and indicators of audience awareness are appended.) (HTH)

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"Research on Writing: Apprehension, Quality, and Audience"

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"Research on Writing: Apprehension, Quality and Audience"

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I.

Like so many others in education, I've been concerned about the quality of student writing. But as a teacher becoming acquainted with the research, I found that I had been focussing too much on the product, not enough on the process, and hardly at all on audience awareness. Early in my studies my eyes were opened by Moffett (1968), Emig (1971), Britton (1975), Winterowd (1975), and Shaughnessy (1977). What I had learned was in addition to McCrimmon's (1976) and Irmscher's (1976) textbook chapters on the same subjects. I was also intrigued by what Braddock (1963) suggested: "to examine carefully certain variables considered critical in writing; namely, writer ability vs. writer performance." I asked myself what was responsible for the imbalance between the two when it occurred. I then decided to take a look at the anxieties of these student writers, this interest leading me to the voluminous research of John Daly, and later the observation of Bloom (1980) that 10-25% of students in any given writing class are apprehensive. Needless to say, major rhetoricians have been claiming that audience is a critical factor in contemporary rhetoric. So my study was this:

II.

My assumptions were that levels of apprehension affect the quality of student writing, and that these effects on quality would be equal for both surface and mechanical features and for syntactic maturity and coherence, these last two indicators reflecting deeper levels of quality such as mature, organized and logical thinking. I also assumed that the role of audience makes a difference in the quality of writing. Thus, I sought to test four hypotheses regarding: 1) the relationship between apprehension and the quality of writing, as measured by syntactic maturity and by coherence; 2) the relationship between apprehension and the quality of this writing when aimed at a distant audience; 3) the relationship between apprehension and quality of writing when aimed at an intimate audience; and 4) the differences in the quality of these writings when aimed at these two different audiences, without regard to apprehension.

My subjects came from a pool of 58 second quarter (Winter, 1980) freshman English students in an open-admissions, general and technical two-year college on the central campus of a large mid-western urban university, the University of Cincinnati. First, they were given the Daly-Miller (1975 b) Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) (See Appendix A). Only those scores differing from the mean by one-half standard deviation in either direction were used. These numbered 21: eight as low apprehensive, 13 as high apprehensive. Next, they wrote

two in-class essays. In the first they explained to a local television station manager (distant audience) why a certain TV show should either be cancelled or continued. In the second essay they explained to a close friend, relative, loved one, or marriage partner why they decided either to continue in school or eventually to drop out. The papers were then evaluated by two trained, competent teachers of writing, according to the specific, measurable criteria chosen to determine the quality of writing: Kellogg Hunt's (1965) T-Unit and W. Ross Winterowd's "The Grammar of Coherence" (1970) formula, a set of seven relationships (or logical connectors) indicating transitional coherence (See Appendix B). The readers counted for T-Unit length and rated coherence on a basis of a 2-10 rating scale, ten being high. All these data were then subjected to a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). The independent variable was the level of apprehension and the dependent variable was the Syntactic Maturity/Coherence Vector, indicating the overall quality of writing in both the distant and intimate audience essays.

The analysis of data revealed no significant relationship between apprehension and the overall quality of writing, nor between apprehension and the quality of writing in either of the two essays, aimed at the distant and at the intimate audiences. But the results did show a significant difference between the quality of writing in the essay aimed

at the intimate audience and that of the essay aimed at the distant audience, without regard to apprehension. More specifically, the syntactic maturity scores for the distant audience essays were significantly higher than those for the intimate audience essays. Conversely, the coherence scores for the distant audience essays were significantly lower than those for the intimate audience essays. Now, what might all this mean?

III

On apprehension and writing quality, my findings do not support those most of the related published research (Daly & Miller, 1975a; Book, 1976; Daly, 1977; Cope, 1978). That is, in those studies apprehension did affect the quality of writing (i.e., low apprehensives wrote more maturely than did high apprehensives). Since the WAT has been validated, there are some possible explanations: 1) the criteria for writing quality in this previous research were, for the most part, such measures as word endings, grammar, spelling, lexical diversity, number of words written, style, vocabulary, complexity of syntax and amount of information conveyed. My measures were syntactic maturity and coherence, indicators of two components of writing quality that measure a student's ability to handle transformations, to subordinate, and to think logically in developing his thoughts and feelings. 2) Furthermore,

audience was a factor in the writing process which was not stipulated in the previous research. 3) I used a half-standard deviation from the mean in either direction, which may have not discriminated sufficiently between the high and low apprehensive scores on the WAT. However, there was one study (Garcia, 1978) that did include syntactic maturity as a measure of quality, the findings of which supported my research: no substantial difference between high and low apprehensives in words per T-Unit.

These findings suggest the following questions: 1) Would further research show correlation between apprehension levels and syntactic maturity when different population samples were used, or when the experiment was conducted in other educational environments, social settings, or on other grade levels? 2) Does the WAT distinguish between two types of people: a) those who have low apprehension because they are fairly competent or are secure for other reasons (such as high self-esteem); and b) those other low apprehensives who attach little importance to writing as a form of communication or survival skill and consequently do not get anxious enough about performing well or poorly? I raise this because Pianko (1979) reaffirmed the assumption about school-sponsored writing, that there is little commitment to it on the student's part: "Although many students had positive feelings about their writing ability [possibly a sign of low apprehension], this was because they were not

being critical or deeply concerned about what they had just written." 3) Are there certain important writing skill difficulties asscciated with apprehension? 4) Can apprehension cause one to write better? Bloom (1979) suggests that anxiety can be an "energizer." Does the WAT measure those anxieties that might motivate the writer in the composing process, those that could cause greater concentration and clearer thinking? 5) Do certain kinds of writing tasks, stimuli or purposes cause greater or lesser anxiety in the writer? Newkirk (1979) observes that five pressures make writing difficult, one of them being the pressure to interest an audience. 6) Are there students who may not have a realistic notion of their anxieties?

IV

The effect of the intended audience upon the quality of writing, as indicated by syntactic maturity, reveals that my findings essentially support those of Crowhurst and Piche (1979), Rubin (1978), and Smith and Swan (1978). That is, students wrote with less syntactic complexity when writing for a more intimate audience than when writing for a more distant audience. What does this imply? First, these students may be taking fewer risks with involved or sophisticated structures in writing to intimate audiences. Second, perhaps they are more simple and direct when communicating to someone closer in a personal role relationship

than to someone in a more distant, functional role relationship in society. The "nearness and dearness" of the reader and the topic may cause simplicity, directness, and conciseness in syntax. There may be some students who have less need to be verbal to those people with whom they are more intimate, nearer to emotionally, or whose thinking they understand better than that of less intimate audiences. Perhaps this is analogous to the "contact of minds" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969), explaining the enthymeme of classical rhetoric. An enthymeme occurs when "the speaker leaves unmentioned the taken-for-granted aspects of an assertion or proposal and leaves unsupported those aspects which get immediate assent." Or as Bitzer states, "It is characterized by premises supplied by the audience (Jackson and Jacobs, 1970)." There may be more tacit communication between those who are more intimate with each other than between those who are less intimate.

A related issue, to which Morenberg (1979) and Faigley (1980) refer, is that researchers have not yet been able to prove that increases in syntactic maturity and overall writing quality are directly related. One can write well and clearly to adapt to readers of cookbooks, without using so-called syntactic maturity, with T-Units measuring as low as 6.5 words per T-Unit. This may be appropriate because recipe instructions than might be more easily remembered.

If it is appropriate that one write with fewer words per T-Unit for an intimate audience, does that then mean his syntax is necessarily "less mature"? The longer T-Unit may not always be "more mature," depending on the purpose, function, and audience of that prose passage. In partial support of this issue about syntax and quality is Faigley's report that parodies of bureaucratic prose have been shown to measure 27.7 words per T-Unit. So Mellon's (1969) term "syntactic fluency" is perhaps more precise, to characterize a quality of good, mature writing. I suggest still another label, "syntactic appropriateness," when describing a quality of writing for certain audiences, implying mature judgments and perceptions in communicating to audiences of readers or listeners.

V

The effect of the audience upon the quality of writing in terms of coherence revealed that the essays aimed at the intimate audience had higher scores than did the essays written for the distant audience. What might this mean? First, the student may be more conscious of connecting his ideas or of giving more coherence to his thoughts, to lead the reader more easily through the discourse. This seems to indicate more evidence of audience awareness than if there were fewer of these transitional markers to cue or signal the reader. For example, the expression "Needless to say,"

as in my introduction, might imply that the writer wants his reader to know that he is aware of a given or probable "obviousness" or redundancy of a stated thought or feeling that he is making. Second, in the intimate audience essay there is less academic information for the writer to handle as she is writing more about personal opinions, decisions, and feelings as contrasted with more academic knowledge related to information about television programs in the distant audience essay. Somewhat similarly, Jacobs (1979) found that when there was extra, relational information to handle with content, students had problems writing "coherent prose" and that the writing was more complex, labored and clumsy. There might have been the difficulty of keeping the audience in mind while adapting referential discourse to an audience, thus causing less coherence. In describing this kind of writing, expanding upon ideas and connecting them beyond the level of the sentence to communicate clearly and logically to an audience, I suggest the terms, "discourse maturity" or "discourse appropriateness."

Since my research did not reveal that the Winterowd instrument had been used elsewhere, I question whether this formula of transitions is too restrictive and confining to measure coherence as a quality of writing. We know of many other indicators of coherence (See Appendix D) and other lists of connectors in textbooks as well as the descriptors of cohesion (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). As the readers

judged, some of my subjects wrote fairly sophisticated content and ideas in effective and mature style. But these same students were rated low in coherence, according to the scale. We also know that professional writers, aiming at particular kinds of readers, use other ways to develop their ideas, themes and characters. In addition, in using the Winterowd formula, the readers had difficulty measuring for implicit transitions, finding them hard to interpret and wanting to guard against reading too much into their possible presence. (See Appendix C for a frequency count of Winterowd's transitions.)

VI

Such difficulties in evaluating writing may arise from not only misinterpreting implied or tacit coherence markers but from the more subjective, not so easily quantifiable indicators of writing quality, such as ideas, organization, and style. This is especially so when there is virtually no consensus regarding the definition of quality. Furthermore, "quality" may be confused with "style" of writing. I suggest this possibility because speakers and writers do change their approaches (or styles) in order to adapt to their audiences, and do suit their styles to the content, topic, purpose, and function of the occasion; that is, to the demands of the rhetorical situation. In my study the topic of whether to continue in school or to drop out is an emotional and personal matter addressed to very close friend

or relative, as contrasted to the topic of one's opinions on TV programs written to an unknown station manager. Because of this, and because the student may value this decision, having lived through it, she may say it more simply and directly; she may also care enough about communicating it to this kind of intimate audience that the reader might follow her train of thought more easily with the coherence markers. So I ask, are we judging quality of writing per se here, or are we judging the appropriate style of writing?

We also characterize writing by its readability levels. Again, is this quality or style? The more readable a piece of literature is to a certain audience, the more appropriate it is. Thus we could measure quality in terms of audience appropriateness, or measure style by another indicator, such as degree of personalism shown toward an audience. One formula for this kind of measurement is the Flesch Human Interest Formula (Emmert and Brooks, 1970). This involves the use of "personal words" (nouns of gender, personal pronouns, etc.) per 100 words and the use of "personal sentences" (direct quotes, questions, requests) per 100 words. (See Appendix E for a frequency count of these personal expressions.)

Perhaps we need a new instrument to measure writing quality, one that would yield a quantitative score, something like Walker Gibson's style machine, described in his Tough, Sweet, Stuffy (1975).

VII

Whether it is quality or style evaluated in research, the good quality or the appropriate style of the product is a result of the quality of the cognitive processes at work in the mind of the composer. The results of my study seem to indicate that some of these processes are operating. In fact, to be more specific, some of the cognitive theories researched and explored by Flower and Hayes (1979, 1980), Barritt and Kroll (1978), Kroll (1978), and Emig (1977) are illustrated in my study, within the framework of the rhetorical situation of the writing assignments. My synthesis of these theories reveals certain dominant aspects of the skilled writers' successful attempts to employ certain mental strategies to solve problems in order to reach their goals. These cognitive features are as follows:

1) seeing relationships, making connections, recognizing patterns and parallels, and making them all work for mapping out the work to be done in the composing process;

2) organizing separate parts and arranging or rearranging them into a unified, coherent, and meaningful whole;

3) interpreting, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the data for the choices that have to be made for creating the product;

4) handling the problem of ego-centricism and "de-centering" so as to think seriously about his reader, putting himself in his place,and structuring his ideas accordingly;

5) recalling stored knowledge and experience, and then applying and relating it strategically to other elements and in certain specific stages of the composing processes so as to further construct meaning;

6) generating ideas and expanding upon them, to discover and rediscover, to "make meaning," to create;

7) managing heavy informational loads with clarity, fluency, and coherence;

8) imagining, analogizing, making metaphors, and poeticizing;

9) responding to the demands of the rhetorical situation, thus coalescing audience, purpose, function, content, persona; and

10) relating all together the world, experience, knowledge, audience, and the self.

More specifically, my findings revealed that increased coherence in the intimate audience essay reflected the ability to make connections and to logically develop ideas so that an audience of readers might easily follow the train of thought. Connections and relationships were made through the use of transitions. Furthermore, this increased use of coherence and indicators of audience awareness, as judged by the Flesch Human Interest Formula, appeared to prove that the problem of cognitive ego-centricism was being solved, at least partially. The higher syntactic maturity scores in the distant audience essay appeared to indicate that there was a handling of heavier informational loads for a more academic topic that stimulated the generating of

ideas in facts and opinions. In addition to what these findings revealed about the cognitive processes at work, my criteria for judging writing quality were ones that assumed that certain cognitive demands were being made of the student writer. Syntactic maturity and coherence represented "deep structure" levels of thinking and the logical development of thoughts and feelings. This is contrasted with other published measures of writing quality that reflect surface structures - mechanical and lexical in nature.

As Emig observes, writing is an act of commitment, a human activity that constructs knowledge through interaction with the world. My study demonstrated that this occurred through the topics addressed and the audiences also addressed.

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APPENDIX A

DIRECTIONS: Below are a series of statements about writing. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling (1) SA if you strongly agree, (2) A if you agree, (3) U if you are uncertain, (4) D if you disagree, or (5) SD if you strongly disagree with the statement. While some of these statements may seem repetitious, take your time and try to be as honest as possible. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

1.	I avoid writing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2.	I have no fear of my writing being evaluated.	SA	A	U	D	SD
3.	I look forward to writing down my ideas.	SA	A	U	D	SD
4.	I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.	SA	A	U	D	SD
5.	Taking a composition course is a very frightening experience.	SA	A	U	D	SD
6.	Handing in a composition makes me feel good.	SA	A	U	D	SD
7.	My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition.	SA	A	U	D	SD
8.	Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.	SA	A	U	D	SD
9.	I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication.	SA	A	U	D	SD
10.	I like to write my ideas down.	SA	A	U	D	SD
11.	I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
12.	I like to have my friends read what I have written.	SA	A	U	D	SD

APPENDIX A Continued

13.	I'm nervous about writing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14.	People seem to enjoy what I write.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15.	I enjoy writing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
16.	I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas.	SA	A	U	D	SD
17.	Writing is a lot of fun.	SA	A	U	D	SD
18.	I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them.	SA	A	U	D	SD
19.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	SA	A	U	D	SD
20.	Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.	SA	A	U	D	SD
21.	I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a composition course.	SA	A	U	D	SD
22.	When I hand in a composition I know I'm going to do poorly.	SA	A	U	D	SD
23.	It's easy for me to write good compositions.	SA	A	U	D	SD
24.	I don't think I write as well as most other people.	SA	A	U	D	SD
25.	I don't like my compositions to be evaluated.	SA	A	U	D	SD
26.	I'm no good at writing.	SA	A	U	D	SD

-- Devised by John A. Daly and Michael D. Miller, 1975

APPENDIX B

An Instrument Measuring Coherence

from

Winterowd, W. Ross. "The Grammar of Coherence" in Winterowd, W. Ross. Contemporary Rhetoric, pp. 225-233. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1975 (also in College English, v. 31, pp. 828-835. May 1970).

> I argue that there is a set of relationships beyond case and syntax and that this set constitutes the relationships that make for coherence - among the transformational units in a paragraph in a chapter, among the chapters in a book. I call these relationships transitions, and I claim that beyond the sentence marker, the double-cross, we perceive coherence only as the consistent relationships among transitions. All of this, of course, is more easily illustrated than explained, and illustration is forthcoming. For the moment, however, I should like to underscore my claim that the relationships I am about to describe constitute the grammar of coherence for all units of discourse beyond the level of what I have called "syntax."
>
> Analysis of thousands of transformational units in sequences reveals that there are seven relationships that prevail amont T-Units and, I would argue, in any stretch of discourse that is perceived as coherent. I have called these relationships (1) coordinate, (2) obversative, (3) causative, (4) conclusive, (5) alternative, (6) inclusive, and (7) sequential. These relationships can be either expressed or implied. They are expressed in a variety of ways: through coordinating conjunctions, transitional adverbs, and a variety of other movable modifiers.
>
> Coordination can always be expressed by and. (Synonyms: furthermore, in addition, too, also, again, etc.)

Obversativity can always be expressed by but. (Synonyms: yet, however, on the other hand, etc.)

Causativity can always be expressed by for.

Conclusivity can always be expressed by so. (Synonyms: therefore, thus, for this reason, etc.)

Alternativity can always be expressed by or.

Inclusivity is often expressed with a colon.

The sequential relationship is expressed by such transitions as "first... second...third," "earlier...later," "on the bottom...in the middle... on top," and so on.

APPENDIX C

Frequency Count of "Grammar of Coherence" Transitions

From a random sample of 29 essays written by moderately apprehensive students (without regard for audience), a frequency count of the Winterowd coherence markers revealed the following:

"and"	(coordination)	expressed 34 times
"but"	(obversativity)	expressed 30 times
"because"	(causativity)	expressed 17 times

The total of 81 such markers accounted for 76% of the grand total of 106 Winterowd markers written by these students.

APPENDIX D

Other Indicators of Coherence

transitional expressions, devices, markers

"moveable interrupters"

conjunctions:
- coordinating
- subordinating
- adverbial

arrangement of sentences

sentence patterns

parallel structures

synonyms

deliberate repetition of key words, ideas, phrases

pronouns referring to antecedents

questions

parentheses

APPENDIX E

Frequency Count of Indicators of Audience Awareness

1. Based on the Flesch Human Interest Formula, a frequency count was made of the indicators of audience awareness found in the 21 essays of the study. Such indicators were personal pronouns, nominative of address, personal references, questions, requests, suggestions and expressions of thanks. This count revealed the following:

Distant Audience Essay

High Apprehensive: 33 indicators
Low Apprehensive: 20 indicators

Total: 53 indicators

Intimate Audience Essay

High Apprehensive: 52 indicators
Low Apprehensive: 23 indicators

Total: 75 indicators

Combined High Apprehensive Total: 85
Combined Low Apprehensive Total: 43

2. Frequency counts of other indicators of audience awareness revealed that both the distant and intimate audiences were addressed in letter form by the greater majority of the student writers. In the distant audience essay 16 out of the 21 students included the greeting and complimentary close expressions; in the intimate audience essay 18 out of 21 used those forms, without regard to apprehension.

APPENDIX F

NUMBER OF WORDS WRITTEN

A count of the number of words written revealed that the high apprehensive writers worte significantly more words than did the low apprehensive writers, in both the distant audience and the intimate audience essays:

	Distant Audience	Intimate Audience Essays
High Apprehensive	193.8 words	197.8 words
Low Apprehensive	159.3 words	146.6 words